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ABSTRACT

This report traces the development of the Egyptian press, from its origin with the arrival of the first printing press in 1789 to the present free press policies of Anwar Sadat. Because political struggle and social reform have accompanied the educational and cultural progress of Egypt, the news publications have traditionally been utilitarian. Official control of the press was established in 1824 and continued until 1974, in spite of weak constitutional provisions for a free press. Gamal Abdul Nasser enforced strict censorship during his regime, with the singular exception that Mohamed Hassanein Heykal, head of the national press department and Nasser's personal friend, was permitted to maintain intellectual independence and to openly criticize government policies. It was a significant step toward a world perspective for Egypt, the report concludes, when Anwar Sadat ended press censorship in 1974. It is paradoxical, however, that Sadat deposed Heykal, his most vocal critic, at the same time. (HAI)

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THE EGYPTIAN PRESS

An Historical View of its Importance in Political Movements

by

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"He that undertaketh the story of a time, specially of any length, cannot but meet with many blanks and spaces which he must be forced to fill up out of his own wit and conjecture."

Francis Bacon

Anwar Sadat has almost emancipated himself from the myth of Gamal Abdul Nasser. The deposing of Mohamad Hassanein Heykal, the most powerful journalistic voice in Egypt, in 1974; asserted Sadat's authority over the largest publishing center in the Middle East. In his attempts to evolve the modernization processes begun by many of his predecessors, Sadat sees de-Nasserization as one of his most crucial steps.

Nasser held the media of Egypt in an iron grip. He understood well the role of media in national development: his famous radio speeches to the more than eighty percent illiterate and predominantly rural population became his axis of control; his "Press Organization law" in May of 1960 placed publishers and journalists under the control of the National Union (later reformed as the Arab Socialist Union). Nasser realized the importance of reaching the twenty percent of his population that read his elitist press, and the influence he maintained with ten percent of the total circulation going outside Egypt to other Arab countries. His force was almost total -- his radio editorials were broadcast on the evening they were published, on the following day they were published in French and English.

This report is a look at the development of the Egyptian press; an important mirror of the evolution of modern Egypt. The history of one of the oldest journalistic countries in the Arab world dates from 1789 when Napoleon came to Egypt and brought the first printing press with him. One year later he published the first Arabic newspaper, Al-Hawadith al-Yawmiyah (The Daily Events). This newspaper ceased publication when the Ottoman Turks excised the French from Egypt in 1801 and there was no newspaper published until the appointment of Muhammad 'Ali as governor

of Egypt in 1805. As part of a program to modernize Egypt and to organize her aggressions against the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul, Muḥammad 'Ali initiated the westernization (or Europeanization) of Egypt. As part of this modernization Muḥammad 'Ali established the Būlāq Press which printed, among other publications, Al-Waq'i al-Misriyah (The Official Gazette, founded November 20, 1828).[1] The texts published by the Būlāq Press were primarily scientific and technical in nature, while the newspapers and journals were purely utilitarian:

> "... while the establishment of printing in Egypt on a permanent basis by Muḥammad 'Ali was indispensable for the revival of Arabic as a literary language in a very wide modern use, the Pasha's aim in establishing Būlāq Press was severely utilitarian. Remarkably responsive as he was to the vistas which modernization unfolded before his eyes, a printing press was not for him a grand cultural gesture, but rather a cooly practical instrument for improving his army, the agriculture of his territory, and the usefulness to him of his subjects, whether Turkish- or Arabic-speaking."[2]

In these initial encounters with Europeanization and Western thought there was little awareness of the philosophical and scientific foundations of Western society dating from the Renaissance and Guttenburg. The involvement with Europe was unemotional. Eastern society (Islam of Egypt) believed that it contained the "Good" and thought what was needed were external changes and corrections, not

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[1]Abdel Meguid Sadik Ramadan, Evolution de la Legislation sur la Presse en Egypte ("Evolution of press legislation in Egypt") (Cairo: D. Photiadis and Co., Press, 1935), p.7.

[2]Richard N. Verdery, "The Publications of the Būlāq Press under Muḥammad 'Ali of Egypt," Journal of the American Oriental Society, XCI (January-March 1971), p.132.

Egyptian adaptation. The consequences of this view became more important in the development of modern literary thought, for this Eastern perspective affected the process of Westernization and foreshadowed the failure of efforts at achieving basic reforms.

It is essential to understand what this literary upheaval meant to the Egyptian people. Historically, the development of the Arabic language and cultural tradition provides an excellent metaphor that still has its effects on the literati of contemporary Egypt. In the ancient world each major race contributed something of its culture to the congealing nature of man's civilizing tendencies. The Indo-Europeans developed metals and some refinements of warfare, the traders of the Mediterranean littoral became the first middle-men in history fostering sea trade and inland exchange, the Greeks and Romans gave us the substance of our political systems. The Semitic people, being primarily nomadic in the days of their early history, fostered the oral tradition and gave us the refinements of language. Through most of their history they have been on the move and it was difficult for them to carry much in the way of trading items nor did they settle long enough to nurture a viable craft other than their language. The Semites became the poets -- the carriers of our earliest oral traditions as can be seen in such cognate terms as: troubador, cymbal, tamboura, tambourine and guitar. The strength of the Arabic language, as demonstrated by a wealth of poets and troubadors in pre-Islamic times, was the challenge that faced Muḥammad in the Seventh century A.D. The faith of the Islamic peoples has largely survived because of the marvel that was the Qur'ān. Muḥammad was an illiterate merchant faced with the power of one of the world's most highly developed languages and what he gave these peoples in the

Qur'ān has become the basis of all grammar, literature and education for the Muslims.

Political struggle and social reform have gone hand in hand with educational and cultural progress in Egypt. The wide gap between colloquial Arabic, the language of the people, and classical Arabic, the language of religion and education; has created some problems, and to a great degree was the catalyst for the Naḥda (renaissance) literary movement of twentieth century Egypt, a movement which broke with two thousand year old traditions of the Arabic language.* Through the press, the Arabic language has been enriched and the Egyptian mind has been turned to the spirit and culture of the West.

From the outset the press of Egypt was an official press of the state. The administrative reforms of Muḥammad 'Ali required weekly reports to be made to the viceroy by the various departments of the government. Soon these reports were being published and circulated among the officials of the state. This was the beginning of the "Gazette". In 1824 Muḥammad 'Ali issued a decree prohibiting the use of the Būlāq Press for any publication without his permission. Prior to this time there were regulations that "appeared to solicit the authorization of the king", but this decree marked the first official press control in Egypt.[3] The first important change for the Gazette came through a reorganization of the staff in 1826. This extended the circulation of the paper to the 'ulamā' (scholars of Islam), state school officials, armed forces and those serving abroad including students

*I am referring here, particularly, to the dropping of the caesura and the movement toward free verse; a discussion much beyond the limits of this paper.

[3]Ramadan, p.3.

pursuing higher education in foreign countries. This reorganization had a twofold effect of increasing the strength of the paper through circulation and an improvement in the content and quality of the articles.

During the reign of Muhammad 'Ali no one attempted to publish an independent newspaper or journal. The press at this stage remained an exclusively state venture. The nature of the press changed, however, with the arrival of Khedive Isma'il in 1863. Isma'il was educated in Europe and his desire was to make Cairo a second Paris. His statement, "Mon pays n'est plus de l'Afrique. Il fait partie de l'Europe!", characterizes his attitude. An admirer of Europe, he encouraged privately owned papers and is credited with the rise of the popular press in Egypt. Isma'il's liberal policies attracted many intellectuals from throughout the Arab world and it was through their attempts to enrich the Arabic language and literature that Isma'il was fostering an environment for a literary revolution in Arabic language and thought. Isma'il was striving for European acceptance of his policies and the recognition of Egypt as Europe's equal. Isma'il tried diverse experiments in order to gain this acceptance. In 1866, with the creation of an Assembly of Delegates, he financed the publication of the first political newspaper, Wadi al-Nīl (Valley of the Nile), to serve as a mouthpiece for his policy. Published twice a week, Wadi al-Nīl defended the Khedive against his detractors. In the educational and cultural fields the Khedive financed and supported the first Egyptian intellectuals, teachers, scientists and officials through the publication of professional academic journals related to their activities. Among these were a medical journal, an educational

journal and a paper of the army staff.[4] Jam'īyat al-Ma'āraf (Society of Learning) was founded in 1868 to promote culture through writing, printing and publishing.[5] Another example of Isma'il's flair for détente with Europe can be seen in the extravagant media coverage of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.

It was in this atmosphere that Al-'Ahrām, first published in Lebanon in 1875 by two wealthy Lebanese, Salim and Bishārah Taqlā; was moved to the fertile literary soil of Egypt. Although Isma'il allowed more freedom than previous administrations, he did keep a watchful eye on publications and suppressed any critical voice. Relatively few papers existed before the late 1870's, but at this point the number began to increase rapidly. In 1881 the government of Egypt, by virtue of several of the Ottoman pasha's directives, had attained virtual autonomy. Prior to this time the laws concerning the press were primarily the laws of the pasha. In 1881 Egypt granted, or as Jacques Berque phrased it "seized", its first constitution detailing the first regulations on the press.

Essentially a publisher, by the terms of Article 1 of that constitution, had to obtain prior authorization from the Minister of the Interior before publishing. Legislation of the Minister of the Interior was absolute and he could refuse authorization. Egypt, at this time, had no previous legislation, so any recourse to the Minister's opinions had no precedence in law. In addition to prior approval a publisher had to post with the ministry the legal address of his publishing house, his

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[4] P.J. Vatikiotis, The Modern History of Egypt (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p.169.

[5] Muhammad Khalfallā, "Literary Life in Modern Egypt in its Relation to the Contemporary World," The Muslim World, XLIV (1954), p.88.

name and address (le dépôt légal of the French system), and prior to publication it was necessary to submit examples of what he wished to publish.[6] Freedom of the press was loosening enough to allow the growth of press system, but the government of Isma'il maintained the hold it felt was necessary.

Isma'il's extravagant schemes to Europeanize Egypt led to national bankruptcy and foreign intervention. In 1882 the army rose in revolt against Tewfīq Pasha (Isma'il's successor) and Turkish domination, but England intervened on behalf of Tewfiq and stopped the revolt, banished its leaders and occupied the country. Though unsuccessful, the revolt marked the beginning of political agitation in Egypt. One consequence of the British occupation was the emergence of the party press. The party presses were created by Western educated, upper-middle class intellectuals who, unable to challenge the British militarily, began forming political parties using the press as their chief medium of political agitation.

> "One redeeming feature of the Occupation regime was the freedom of the press. The people were left free to expound their views on various subjects, and to give vent to their feelings in the daily papers and periodicals, all published regularly and in abundance in Arabic. By this means the Government insured itself against underground machinations, and kept itself abreast of all views and complaints circulating in the country."[7]

The party press begun by Isma'il as a means of combatting foreign

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[6] Ramadan, pp.23-24.

[7] M. Rifaat Bey, The Awakening of Modern Egypt (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), p.235.

interference and to forestall European intervention in Egypt was to eventually turn against his successors.

The Nineteenth century should be marked as the beginning of Egypt's modern history. At the turn of the century a long period of intellectual and cultural stagnation that had begun in the Sixteenth century came to an end. Early in the Nineteenth century the religious leaders of al-'Azhar, the world's oldest university and the "voice" of Islam, came into contact with scholars accompanying the French forces. As a result their minds were awakened to modern methods in thinking. The earliest representatives to be sent to Europe and the first to do translations from European languages were chosen from among these scholars to take part in finding Arabic equivalents to Western scientific expressions.[8] This broadening of intellectual horizons eventually gave the writers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries the ground in which they could sow the seeds for nationalism and Egyptian identity.

In the Egyptian situation one begins to see certain ideals of the westernization process: Evacuation of foreign influence, Egypt for the Egyptians, integrity of the Ottoman Empire (the Empire of Islam), internal reforms and foreign alliances. Egypt needed an economic and cultural revival and it was the press of modern Egypt that would provide this renaissance.

Prominent writers now had at their disposal, not only a literary outlet, but also, a forum for the expression of their ideas on various subjects pertinent to Egyptian nationalism. Despite their continued loyalty to the Islamic character of the Ottoman sultanate-caliphate, these early journalists and publicists were helping to lay the foundations of a

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[8]Khalfallāh, p.87.

stronger Egyptian identity which assisted the local ruling house in its demands for further separation and greater independence from Turkey. Furthermore, they were breaking the ground for the movement away from traditional learning, writing and social thought. The introduction of the "editorial" to express, develop and argue a single idea clearly, briefly and logically was a far cry from the encyclopedic ramblings of earlier traditional writing. More significant was the fact that these journalists were introducing the Egyptians to an articulate means of criticizing established authority. Bishārah, one of the founding Taqlā brothers, and one of Al-'Ahrām's earliest editorial "by-line" writers, did much to develop this taste for criticism in the Egyptian intellectual. His by-lines would continually echo what he referred to as Eastern public opinion and his policy remained "Egypt for the Egyptians", Egyptian control over their own affairs. This criticism was demonstrated in his attacks on England's occupational policies, he criticized the British monopoly of administrative positions and emphasized the necessity of union with the Ottoman Turks to preserve the Islamic territories.[9] The sincerity of these nationalistic efforts are somewhat questionable because of the now, known association of Al-'Ahrām with French political efforts in Egypt. British moves were continually countered with French subsidies to the Cairo daily for a favorable press.

It was in the press that major reform ideas were first presented: the religious reform ideas of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, the nationalist movements of Mustafa Kamil and Sa'ad Zaghlul, and many others. In fact, between 1900 and 1950, literate Egyptians did not as a matter of course read books, they read newspapers, magazines and periodicals. Significantly, Egyptians

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[9]Leon Zolondek, "Al-'Ahram and Westernization: Socio-Political Thought of Bishārah Taqlā," Die Welt Des Islams, XII (1969/70), p.182.

were introduced to the rationalism and pragmatism of European science via the press which, after 1882, was led both by Egyptians and Syrians. A direct consequence of this early journalistic activity was the appearance of private publishing companies owned and directed by Egyptian newspaper publishers and editors, so that the commercial publishing business also had its beginning in this period. This blossoming of the press systems continued to stir up the ideas of nationalism and Egyptian identity in the minds of their readers. In 1907, Mustafa Kamil, founded the Nationalist Party and used its paper Al-Liwa' (the Standard), to create a sense of Egyptian identity. Sa'ad Zaghlul founded Al-Wafd Party (the Delegation) whose paper Al-Balagh (the Message, later known as Al-Misri -- the Egyptian) was used to mobilize the Egyptians behind such slogans as independence and constitutionalism.[10]

This political agitation found its strongest expression in the 1919 popular revolt. The aristocracy sensed the menace of the growing press system and organized the Liberal Constitutional Party and espoused their own views in the newspaper Al-Siyasah (politics) and in 1922 this party convinced the British to grant limited independence to the Egyptians. The country became a monarchy with a parliament and Ahmed Fuad (whom Farouq succeeded in 1937) became its first king. Press freedom was stressed as a constitutional provision but it received only lip service. Section two of article 15 of that constitution stated "the press is free within the law and no censorship would be imposed, and that government would not confiscate newspapers by mere administrative acts", but these provisions proved meaningless, in that, the same article declared that such measures might be

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[10]Adnan Almaney, "Government Control of the Press in the United Arab Republic," Journalism Quarterly, IL (Summer 1972), p.341.

invoked "in the interests of the social system".[11] In 1936 a new constitution was drafted that lifted many press restrictions: particulary, press criticism of the king, and the government was deprived of its power to suspend papers through administrative acts. The one remaining clause, "the press is free within the law" provided the party in power with the ability to suppress opposition voices.[12]

The Westernization of Egypt was a part of many Egyptians' lives by the time of Farouq in 1937. Indeed, with the increase in the number of educated people, the press continued to influence the educated toward the ideals of modernization. As early as 1880, Bishārah argued that it was not possible to live an isolated life, in one of his editorials in Al-'Ahram, which I quote from here:

> "What was the state of justice fifty years prior to the intrusion of Europe? ... Indeed, it suffices to Europe's credit that it stopped oppression and awakened the mind to the benefits of consultation .... Furthermore, Europe will not leave after we have caused her to enter. Even if we wanted to do without Europe, especially her money, Europe would force us to seek her help for she has progressed ahead of us; and furthermore, while we have no capital, Europe has gathered in her treasury the two factors of political life, namely, financial and cultural power. Not only is it impossible for the Easterner to do without Europe, he must realize that his salvation rests with her, either culturally through her science and civilization or politically by the conciliation of some European state."[13]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ramadan, p.234.

[13] Zolondek, p.189.

Westernization continued through the 1930's, and World War II, though by no choice of the Egyptian people, continued to increase their involvement with the Western world. After the war, Egyptian intellectuals, in their search for new political direction, turned to such radical groups as the Muslim brotherhood and the Communist party. A lack of serious reform programs, overcrowding of cities and unemployment, plus the situation that occurred in Palestine in 1948, prompted a group of middle class army officers led by Gamal Abdul Nasser to depose King Farouq on July 23, 1952, establish a republican régime and abolish the constitution. The Revolutionary Command Council dissolved all political parties and imposed press censorship to do away with the criticism of their takeover. This press censorship was lifted for a time in 1954, but the press took advantage of this freedom and Nasser reimposed censorship one month later with a stern warning to be either approving of the government's activities or to be noncommittal. Nasser even went beyond censorship in his dealings with the Press Syndicate. The Minister of National Guidance ordered the syndicate dissolved, charging that certain members had taken bribes from old politicians for favorable treatment from the press.[14] Other journalists and publishers who had taken advantage of the lifting of press censorship, were handled severely. Inflicting fines, imprisonment and revocation of licenses was not lost on the journalists that survived. Since that time few journalists have openly criticized the régime or demanded the return of parliamentary rule.

The singular exception to these regulations was Mohamed Hassanein Heykal. Until his removal from power on February 1, 1974, Heykal was the most powerful man in Arab journalism.

Heykal started small but with an unusual amount of drive, as his

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[14] Almaney, p.342.

cohorts later characterized him. His first journalistic experience was as a copyboy for the Egyptian Gazette in 1942. He climbed fast working as a layout man and apprentice reporter for Rose al-Yussef and Akher Sa'a. The conflict over Palestine was the meaningful turning point in his career. As a war correspondent for Akher Sa'a, he met Nasser and formed the friendship that was so important to his career.

> "Nasser needed the help Heykal was ready to extend. Nasser's Philosophy of the Revolution (1954), a highly personal manifesto, resulted from conversations between the two men, and it bears the impress of Heykal's style. The same influence marks the speeches with which Nasser first bored, then electrified, the Egyptian and Arab masses."[15]

From the revolution onward, Heykal's influence with Nasser grew and in August 1957, Nasser made him editor-in-chief of Al-'Ahrām. With the nationalization of the newspapers, Heykal took over the national press department. In 1965, he was named member of the secretariat of Egypt's sole party, the Arab Socialist Union.[16]

The government reinstated the Press Syndicate in 1955 with the objective of increasing the efficiency of the press, prompting the cooperation of its members and raising the moral and material standards; but this revival of the Syndicate was a controlling factor, not a liberalizing one. Nasser decreed that no Egyptian would be permitted to practice journalism until he had joined the Press Syndicate ... the press continued to function under rigid censorship.

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[15]Desmond Stewart, "Letter from Cairo: The Rise and Fall of Muhammad Heikal," Encounter, XLII (June, 1974), p.89.

[16]Fiches du Monde Arabe (Arab World File), Biographies-Egypt: "Mohamed Hassanein Heykal," Number 228 (March 12, 1975).

Several proposals were made between 1955 and 1960, but none of them were instituted because of the Party's fears of international opinion and local or regional reactions. Instead, during this time the government began publishing their own newspapers: Al-Sha'ab (the People) and Al-Gumhouriyah (the Republic) and Al-Misa' (the Evening). Nasser discovered the waste of energy in this way of handling things and in May of 1960, he issued a decree nationalizing the press, probably the most severe governmental act of his régime, as several of the major publishing houses were put under the control of the National Union. Owners who were put out of business were compensated for their properties and editors were assured of their jobs, but in the future, any Egyptian who wanted work as a journalist had to obtain authorization from the National Union.

At first, press nationalization brought little change in the structure of the Egyptian press, but the installation of a number of Marxists and Socialists, in 1964, as managers and editors balanced the moderate and conservative positions of the press. This coincided with Nasser's proclamation that Egypt was a "socialist, democratic, and cooperative" country. Arab socialism came about in this way and writers began to explain to the Egyptians the compatibility of socialism, Islam and Arab Nationalism. Socialism was depicted as a revival of the great Islamic past -- and that the prophet Muḥammad was the first socialist. Due to the repetition of such themes as Arab socialism, Arab unity, revolutionary spirit, imperialism; due to an absence of any criticism of Nasser or his régime, the press lacked the courage for serious criticism. The only "licensed" critic was Mohamed Hassanein Heykal, editor at this time of Al-'Ahrām and confidant of Nasser. With Nasser's

rise to power, their relationship became closer. When the press was nationalized he took over as director of the national press department, while remaining editor of Al-'Ahrām.

Heykal published a long editorial column every Friday (the Moslem day of congregation and the equivalent of a Sunday edition) called Frankly Speaking (Bi Sarāha) which reflected the thoughts of the administration and soon gained the international reputation as the voice of the party and its policies. But it was the vocalization of Heykal's personal ideals for Egypt that was his eventual undoing.

Heykal always maintained his intellectual independence and opposed his friend Nasser on a number of issues. It was the continuance of this criticism under Anwar Sadat, who took the reigns of government with Nasser's death in September 1970, that created the hostility between Heykal and Sadat. Heykal continued to criticize Sadat's policies at home and abroad: his expulsion of the Soviets in 1972, his dealings with the United States over the Arab-Israeli crisis; and Heykal became quite vocal regarding Arab regimes and their handling of the war. It was expressed by some of his press cohorts that Heykal was attempting to define the foundation of his own regime and that he had taken certain points too far. In February 1974, Sadat agreed and "the voice of Al-'Ahrām" was no longer speaking for the government. The fact that Sadat could remove such a powerful man as Heykal and maintain the public support was an excellent example of his popularity with the people -- due to a great extent to the October War. Also in February 1974, Sadat ended the press censorship begun under Abdul Nasser. With the exception of military matters -- critical to a state in constant readiness for war -- Sadat lifted the restrictions on the Egyptian press. Foreign

correspondents in Cairo were relieved of the duty of submitting their reports, except on military matters, for censorship. In many ways Sadat is continuing to loosen the bonds imposed by Nasser's régime in an attempt to liberalize and to continue to modernize Egypt.

Anwar Sadat has inherited quite a legacy from Abdul Nasser. The politics of internal reform geared to instilling the masses with a keener political and social consciousness are continuing, but with the continued crisis of the Arab-Israeli conflict forcing Sadat into a more worldly perspective in his political dealings. Nasser bequeathed a formidable press heritage, but the all clear for a total de-Nasserization came when Sadat deposed Hassanein Heykal. Heykal was the last pillar of the Nasser régime and because of their friendship remained as the guardian of Nasserism.

Anwar Sadat is dealing with the largest and most organized media system in the Arab world. All of the important newspapers and magazines are now owned by the government, although the four big publishing houses of al-'Ahrām, Dar al-Hilal, Dar Akhbar al-Yom, and Dar al-Gomhouriya, operate as separate entities and compete with each other commercially. Sadat's decision to lift the restrictions on the press is a signal of his intention and ability to continue the modernization of Egypt, and to increase the rapprochement between Egypt and the West.

There are certain obstacles in East-West communication that must be overcome for Sadat to develop his country's outward mobility. The Westerner's ignorance of the Middle East, increased superficiality of reporting stemming from technological improvements, political and social factors that cause government leaders to block the crucial information flow; all of these could severely impede Egypt's growth. The most crucial factor

to Egypt's press system is for them to recognize the existence of world-wide, instant communication and that their audience is now the world -- their information source is now the world. The ethnocentricism of Egypt's press system must be exchanged for the world perspective Sadat is seeking. The press freedom of Egypt was lost to a nationalist military revolution. Sadat seems to be tryirg to change the situation, but there is a paradox in his lifting press restrictions while removing his most vocal critic. But it should be remembered, Anwar Sadat was the editor of Al-Gumhouriyah before Nasser brought him into politics; perhaps a more tolerant view of press freedom could lead to the level of modernity, the much-needed national stability, that Sadat is seeking.

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